

FAQs about Hawaii Superferry's Whale Avoidance Policy

Where can we find a copy of the Hawaii Superferry's whale avoidance policy?

The policy will be available on the Hawaii Superferry website.

Has the Sanctuary Advisory Council made efforts to identify possible actions to reduce vessel-whale collisions?

The Sanctuary Advisory Council (SAC) was among the first to identify the potential risks of an inter-island superferry traveling at high speeds up to 48 mph to Hawaii's population of humpback whales. In 2003, the SAC's vessel strike working group and its partners sponsored a workshop to assess ship strike risks to whales in Hawaii and to identify possible actions to reduce the occurrence of vessel/whale collisions in Hawaiian waters and throughout the National Marine Sanctuary System. A panel of presentations at the workshop focused on vessel trends, design issues and emerging mitigation techniques in which the proposed Hawaii Superferry was discussed. A workshop report on management needs to minimize vessel collisions with whales can be found at http://www.hawaiihumpbackwhale.noaa.gov/special_offerings/sp_off/Vessel_collision_wkshp.html. Overall, the Sanctuary Advisory Council's guidance is to consider measures that address potential collisions between whales and any vessel operating in Hawaiian waters. Equally important is for the Sanctuary to continue to maintain an open dialogue amongst interested parties including vessels operators to find workable solutions to reduce the risks of vessel whale interactions to Hawaii's humpback whales.

How has the SAC addressed potential risks from Hawaii Superferry to Hawaii's humpback whales?

The Sanctuary Advisory Council has worked to develop recommendations to identify measures focused on reducing the risks of interactions between Hawaii Superferry and Hawaii's humpback whales. At its meeting held in Kihei, Maui on March 17, 2005, the council passed a resolution (website link to minutes) that outlined its recommendations for the ferry's procedures to avoid interactions with humpback whales as the ship transited through sanctuary waters. Hawaii Superferry submitted its whale avoidance policy to the council in May 2005. The council recognized that the policy submitted incorporates the SAC's recommendations and speaks to the minimum requirements for whale avoidance that they deemed to be appropriate with current and available technology.

Does this mean that the Sanctuary Advisory Council is supporting/endorsing the Hawaii Superferry?

The SAC's approach to addressing this issue was to identify measures that would help to reduce the potential risks of interactions between the Hawaii Superferry and Hawaii's humpback whales. The SAC did not vote on whether it supported or endorsed the Hawaii Superferry.

What does NOAA's Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale NMS program think about Hawaii Superferry's whale avoidance policy proposal?

Hawaii Superferry's whale avoidance policy encompasses strategies that are being employed in other regions where ship strikes are an issue including tailoring vessel traffic and lowering speed in high density areas where potential collision risks are higher. The sanctuary management recognizes that Hawaii Superferry has taken a significant step in developing the whale avoidance policy, however we remain concerned that vessel-whale collisions in general are a serious threat to humpback whales in Hawaii. Like the SAC, the sanctuary management is not taking a position for or against the Superferry, but rather acknowledging the efforts the company has made to minimize the chances of one of its vessels striking a whale. We will continue to do all we can to work with Hawaii's maritime community to develop and implement measures that reduce the likelihood of vessel-whale collisions and other adverse interactions with humpback whales.